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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CODEL BISHOP MEETING WITH IRAQI COUNCIL OF  
REPRESENTATIVES SPEAKER AYAD AL-SAMARRAIE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Gary A. Grappo. Reasons 1.  
4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 5 meeting with CODEL Bishop, Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Ayad Al-Samarraie asserted that Iraqis were now more willing to form issue-based vice sectarian/ethnic-based political alliances, which boded well for the future. Al-Samarraie declared that the GOI was paying insufficient attention to the return of Iraqis from exile and maintained that the GOI's failure to carry out its responsibilities with regard to Sunni militias was stalling the reconciliation process. On Arab-Kurd relations, he said that it was better not to try to solve such contentious issues until there was stability in Iraq -- that with ethnic-sectarian tensions, attempting to solve this problem now would in fact ignite more problems for Iraq. Asked specifically about the status of hydrocarbons legislation, Al-Samarraie suggested that, if the United States were interested in its passage, it needed to nudge the Kurds. End Summary.

¶2. (C) CODEL Bishop -- (Sanford D. Bishop Jr. (D-Georgia); Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas); Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-Michigan); Devin Nunes (R-California); and Andre Carson (D-Indiana)) -- joined by Ambassador Hill, met with Iraqi Council of Representatives Speaker (CoR) Ayad al-Samarraie August 5 at the CoR. Al-Samarraie was accompanied by Tawafuq bloc leader Dhafer al-Ani (IPC) and CoR Committee on Foreign Affairs member Salman al-Jumaili (IIP). The meeting lasted 45 minutes.

Achievements: Security, Elections, Issue-Based Alliances

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¶3. (C) Following Congressman Bishop's explanation that Congressman Murtha, the Chair of the Defense Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, had tasked his group to obtain an overview of the "transition" -- both military and political -- now taking place in Iraq, Speaker Al-Samarraie summarized what he believed to be the achievements of and challenges facing the this time of change.

¶4. (C) Speaker Al-Samarraie said that Iraq had been fairly successful regarding security, even as some security issues remained. He commented that Iraq had made strides in the area of elections, noting the successful provincial elections and the formation of new Provincial Councils. Although, according to the Provincial Powers Act, they possessed new authorities, the Provincial Councils were not exercising them very well to date. Time would be needed for the transfer of power from the central government to the provinces. Iraqis were about to begin campaigning for national elections that would bring new parties to power. Groups formerly against the political process were now willing to take part in that process. Al-Samarraie said he believed that Iraqis were now more willing to form electoral alliances based on issues rather than sectarian agendas and on nationwide rather than regional levels.

¶5. (C) Al-Samarraie commented that much work remained in the

area of institutional development. He said that U.S. agencies have been very helpful in developing Iraqi democratic institutions; USAID, for example, had been working with the Iraqi elections agencies.

Challenges: Refugees, Reconciliation, Employment, Kirkuk

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**¶6. (C)** On the challenges facing the "transition," Al-Samarraie focused on issues to which, he believed, the government was not paying sufficient attention. First was the issue of refugees and Iraqis in exile. That morning, he Qthe issue of refugees and Iraqis in exile. That morning, he said, he had met with a person from U.S. National Public Radio (NPR) who was writing a book on Iraqi refugees. She had informed him that she was upset that there seemed to be no GOI program to bring refugees back to Iraq. It was as though there was a program to keep them out of the country, she complained.

**¶7. (C)** On the challenge of "reconciliation," Al-Samarraie said that the United States had developed a program that enabled former Sunni militia members to participate in the Iraqi political system. An agreement had been reached whereby the government would eventually transfer 20 percent of these group members onto the government rolls where they would serve in local police forces and in the Iraqi military.

The remaining 80 percent were to be integrated into the civil service. (Note: Al-Samarraie appears to have been referring to the Sons of Iraq. End Note.) The salaries of the former militia members, initially paid by the United States were to be assumed by the Iraqi government. But the process has been slow. Al-Samarraie claimed that only 7

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percent of the 90,000 members of the Sunni militias in question had been integrated into the security services (versus the GOI pledge of 20 percent) and only 13 percent into the civil service (versus the promised 80 percent). Al-Samarraie warned that unless a way was found to ensure the complete integration of these former militia members, there might be a return to violence that would mark a step backward. "Reconciliation" meant different things to different people. Nevertheless, it was crucial to the future of Iraq. Until there was stability in Iraq -- and reconciliation was a key to that stability -- the foundation for the future would not be firm, Al-Samarraie contended.

**¶8. (C)** On employment challenges, Al-Samarraie said that for the last three years, government hiring had proceeded on a political basis: jobs were awarded according to party quotas. Unfortunately, this process meant that Iraqis were not given equal opportunities for jobs. It was necessary for one to be able to apply for a government job without the support of a political party.

**¶9. (C)** On Kirkuk, Ninewa and other areas disputed between the GOI and Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), Al-Samarraie stated it was better that "we" not try to solve the issues until there was more stability in Iraq. "When people are in a better mood, then we can solve. But with ethnic/sectarian tensions, if we start to solve now, we are in fact igniting more problems for Iraq."

Hydrocarbons Legislation

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**¶10. (C)** In response to Rep. Bishop's invitation to comment on the progress and timeline of some "tough issues," specifically a hydrocarbons law, Speaker Al-Samarraie said that this important legislation was almost completed, but that a political decision was required for its passage. Without the law there would be no international investment. If there were a law that allowed the awarding of contracts, the government would not have to "come to the CoR for everything." He continued that some Kurdish figures were

connecting passage of the hydrocarbons law with the passage other laws on revenue sharing. It would be necessary to convince the Kurds to accept the law to allow it to pass. He noted that the Kurds had accepted the necessity of a hydrocarbons law, but linkages to other legislation were holding up movement. Al-Samarraie remarked that there was also an internal debate on the nature of investment: some preferred direct internal investment by Iraqis while others argued that international investment was preferable and necessary. In the end, it remained a political decision. Al-Samarraie concluded by observing that the United States had been advising the Kurds not to oppose the hydrocarbons law. If the United States was interested in passage of the law, it needed to nudge the Kurds more.

¶11. (C) In response to Rep. Nunes' question as to where the trouble spots lay ahead and what the United States and the U.S. Embassy could do to help, Al-Samarraie raised the U.S.-Iraq SOFA. He said the United States needed to pay attention to those things already agreed to in the SOFA. This advice also applied to the Iraqi side, he noted, raising once more the responsibility of the GOI to commit funds for the former militias in their transition to the government.

¶12. (C) On other sore spots, CoR member Dhafer al-Ani interjected that the Iraqi government's position on negotiations with former Iraq (Sunni) insurgent groups in Turkey and its position on potential talks with such Shi'a groups in Iraq amounted to a double standard for discussions with terrorists. Al-Samarraie reiterated that Iraqis were not as sectarian as they once were. What happened was in the past and if there were a return to sectarianism it would be because of Iraq's "neighbors," who might want to incite such actions in Iraq, rather than the desire of the Iraqi people.

¶13. (U) CODEL Bishop did not clear on this cable before departing post.

HILL